

SOME NEW BOOKS.

Professor J. P. Mahaffy has written an ingenious and suggestive essay on the "Art of Conversation" and inquiries into the various aptitudes and qualifications which are necessary to excellence in the social exchange. If not of thought, at least of speech. The sum of the interest appears to be that the good talker is rather born than made, and that while study, observation and practice will enable an ordinarily intelligent person to talk interestingly under certain conditions, the want of tact cannot be compensated by any other preparation for the work. An unavoidable inference from these premises would, but for the perverting influence of human vanity, relate to a refreshing silence all who were aware of their deficiency in the divine afflatus. If only those essayed conversation whom nature had endowed to that end, it may be doubted whether human talk would have so declined to the mere bandying of trivialities and ineptitudes. But as the astute and antique definition of the poet, which should have warned from the outskirts of Tarsus, the timeless lessons, has never hindered the raising of harsh voices within the sacred precincts of Apollo's groves, so the social aspirants, unblinded by tact, hesitate none the more to enter the conversational arena.

It may be thought too by some readers of Professor Mahaffy's bright little book that the palm in conversation can only be won by ethical concessions and compromises, suggestive of danger to moral integrity. The maintenance of that agreeable mean in which all are amused and none are offended obviously requires so careful a choice and treatment of topics as must exclude nearly all subjects about which strong emotions of any kind are centred. Controversy of course possible only when both sides are equally sure of their own self-command, and this is in the nature of things an uncommon conjunction. But Professor Mahaffy has many things to say which the thoughtful reader will find of interest, and after digesting the little volume he may discover, after the manner of M. Jourdain, that he has been conversing all his life without knowing it.

"The Book of Genesis" (A. C. Armstrong & Son), by Marcus Dods, D. D., is a painstaking presentation of the historical incidents recorded in the first book of the Bible, and of the theology which underlies them. While it contains nothing especially original, it puts many things in a fresh and interesting light. It is strongly evangelical in tone.

Brevet Brigadier-General Henry L. Abbott, of the Engineer Corps of the Army, delivered a series of lectures upon the "Defense of the Sea Coast of the United States" before the Naval War College, Newport, R. I., in November last. No man in the Army or Navy was better qualified to present this subject in a thorough and comprehensive manner than was General Abbott. He presented facts showing that the coast and harbors are practically defenseless, and that expenditures for coast defense should be regarded as a necessary business outlay. These lectures have been compiled and published in a small volume by Dr. Van Nostrand.

"Evolution and its Relation to Religious Thought," by Joseph Le Conte (D. Appleton & Co.), is an expanded answer to the three questions—What is evolution? Is it true? What then? The little book is an admirable exposition in small compass of the scientific doctrine of evolution. It shows that the truths of religion are not jeopardized by any facts which evolution has established. Clergymen who contemplate attacking evolution in their pulpits will find much helpful matter in this book—matter which might lead them to take a somewhat different attitude on the question.

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